



Appropriations Committee
March 7, 2014 Public Hearing

**Testimony in favor of
SB 145 AN ACT CONCERNING REDUCED FARES ON THE METRO-NORTH RAILROAD.**

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Kane, Representative Minor, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Dawn A. McDaniel, Executive Vice President of the Connecticut Veterans Chamber of Commerce. The Connecticut Veterans Chamber of Commerce seeks to foster growth and opportunity for veteran-owned businesses and veterans transitioning to the workforce.

The Connecticut Veterans Chamber of Commerce represents the voice of over 42,000 veteran owned businesses in the state, accounting for 8% of the state's GDP. Studies have shown that Veterans operate successful businesses and are more likely to hire veterans. Over the past four years, the UConn Entrepreneur Bootcamp for Veterans with Disabilities has invested \$1.2 Million into veteran-owned businesses, which has resulted in \$7 Million in gross revenues and workforce opportunities. We support state legislation that lowers barriers to entry to business ownership, economic reintegration, workforce development, and transition to the civilian sector.

In Connecticut, the veteran unemployment rate is about 8% overall, however veteran unemployment for 18-24 year olds remains in double digits. These brave few support our nation's freedoms and offer unrelenting support in the state's time of need, yet return home to high unemployment, underemployment, and a restricted business market. Servicemembers, veterans, and their families need viable opportunities for a successful transition.

SB 145 takes steps to lower barriers for veterans returning to the civilian workforce. Allowing a military fare for all Metro-North Railroad routes will expand the opportunities for veterans seeking employment.

Primarily, this is an issue of retention and opportunity. When military servicemembers leave the Armed Forces, they can obtain immediate residency in any state in the nation. We want veterans to know that while others states may have better weather and lower costs of living, there are better workforce opportunities in Connecticut.

We support SB 145 and appreciate the committee's efforts to provide opportunities to our veterans and lower barriers that ease the transition to the civilian sector. We look forward to serving as a resource to this committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify, and I am available for any questions you may have.